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Universal Service/Network Democracy Participants' Contributions

This page contains material submitted by seminar participants for inclusion in the on-line site created for the Universal Service/Network Democracy on-line seminar. If you have additional contributions that you would like to make for this section, please send them to info@info-ren.pitt.edu.

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Summary:

Comments of the Navajo Nation

Contributed by: Barry Chad <chadb@clpgh.org>

Date: Tue, 03 Sep 1996

The bottom line of the Comments of the Navajo Nation is that

lack of financial resources to implement the basic infrastructure for information technology has kept Indian Nations from advanced and enhanced telecommunications benefits.

The Navajo Nation is concerned for the vitality of services to schools, libraries and health care providers which technology will enhance.

Much of the Nation, which counts 219,000 members and covers 17.5 million acres, spanning the states of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, consists of rural and underserved areas. There is no shortage of barriers and obstacles to technological parity with non-Indian communities. These include extreme isolation, lack of potential on investment, and poor levels of subsidy on behalf of households great distances from central offices.

The Navajo Nation cannot afford to sustain the high costs of adequate connectivity. Chapter Houses, a focus of community (along with schools) are local governing centers to which people travel great distances and to which few-to-no entrepreneurial providers would be attracted. In short, competition for service provision does not and will not exist.

- Core services should provide basic voice, 911-dialing and response systems, and data services common to urban communities.
- The schools should have high-bandwidth access to service centers not common to reservation-based communities.
- Chapter Houses should become true communications centers in keeping with the Navajo cultural base.

Distant learning technology can allow the Navajo Nation to provide courses on the Navajo language; yet, an electronic classroom at each required site carries an estimated cost of \$150,000 per site. Some users of the Navajo Nation Library System now travel great distances to simply access a library. In the midst of great technological change, an abiding and overwhelming need is simply the installation of public telephones in all communities and Chapter Houses: 76 percent of Navajo homes lack telephone service.

To gain adequate access to distant learning, the benefits of telemedicine, and the resources of online libraries, the Navajo Nation requests implementation of rules that will offer just, reasonable and affordable rates comparable to those in non-Indian urban areas.

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Summary:

U.S. Catholic Conference, et al.:

Comments

Contributed by: Barry Chad <chadb@clpgh.org>

Date: Wed, 04 Sep 1996

The comments are directed on behalf of the most vulnerable members of American society--homeless persons and migrant workers.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 requires the FCC to adopt rules that ensure nondiscriminatory access to basic and advanced telecommunications services for all Americans. In the case of the homeless, telecommunications services can provide an effective means of obtaining jobs, housing, medical care and access to social services. For migrant workers such services have helped them to earn their livelihood, keep their families together, and obtain access to basic social services. For the children in both groups, telecom services have been used to improve their ability to obtain an education.

Most Americans need not worry about how they will communicate with employers, landlords, government officials, or family members. But shelters often have only one phone to serve all of their clients: the ratio is often more than 50 people per phone. In addition, a stigma often attaches to giving out a shelter number as a place to be reached.

Access to voice mail, increases opportunities for employment, learning and training. Computers promise to help keep homeless children connected to their schools. Migrant workers spend about half of the year traveling; they cannot contact a prospective landowner to determine whether the crop is ready or whether they should delay their travels.

Possible solutions to these problems that the FCC should examine in its rulemaking are:

- support for voice mail
- subsidies to non-profit service providers, such as schools and shelters
- an increase in the availability of urban and rural emergency and public payphones
- ensuring that service providers make consumers aware of available programs once they are implemented.

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Summary:

U.S. Catholic Conference, et al.:

Reply Comments

Contributed by: Barry Chad <chadb@clpgh.org>

Date: Wed, 04 Sep 1996

The reply comments assert that the proposals put forth by the U.S. Catholic Conference in the Comments comport with Section 254(c)(1) of the Telecom Act for eligibility for universal support:

- **Voice mail:**

Effective communication with employers and service providers is essential to the education, public health and public safety of homeless persons and migrant farmworkers.

Represents a substitute for basic telephone service, which is widely subscribed to by over 94% of all residential customers.

Is widely deployed in the public telecommunications network.

Enables these groups to become fuller participants in society.

All providers of such service should be eligible for universal service support.

- **Subsidizing telephone initiation costs and providing low telephone rates for non-profit organizations that serve homeless persons and migrant farmworkers should be included in the universal service support mechanism:**

Access to basic phone and advanced communications services has profound effects on improving shelter service to clients.

Increases homeless persons' and migrant farmworkers' ability to communicate with employers, landlords, government officials, educational and medical facilities, emergency services and family members.

Basic phone service is initiated by and subscribed to by a majority of residential customers

Is consistent with the public interest through the service which is afforded to the constituencies.

- **Subsidized toll free numbers for non-profit organizations:**

Enables homeless persons and migrant farmworkers to obtain essential information regarding shelter availability, healthcare, education, etc.

Serves the public interest by making service providers more accessible to the people they serve.

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Summary: Kinko's Inc.: Comments

Contributed by: Barry Chad <chadb@clpgh.org>

Date: Sat, 07 Sep 1996

Kinko's sees the Internet as a critical telecommunications service and believes that decisions made now will determine a future disparity between "information haves" and "information have-nots" in American society. Because of the costs of equipment (total costs are likely to be at least \$1500), Internet access remains out of reach for millions of Americans.

As part of the "advanced services" solicited by the FCC for inclusion in the universal service program, Kinko's is advocating

Community Internet Access at hundreds of locations throughout the United States. Kinko's customers who do not have the necessary computer, modem and printer at their home will be able to send e-mail, search for a new job, and access the tremendous wealth of governmental, education and business information on the Internet. Millions of Americans will find affordable Internet access at Kinko's.

Such a program would be implemented through Internet vouchers provided to individuals who are unable to afford equipment in their own homes. These vouchers would be used at Community Internet Access centers operated by Kinko's and others.

Kinko's believes that such a Community Internet Access/voucher system satisfies the criteria laid out by the Telecom Act and provides low-income users affordable access to increasingly critical electronic information services.

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Summary: Alliance for Distance Education in CA

Contributed by: Janet W. Claassen <jclaass@psnw.com>

Date: Thu, 29 Aug 1996 19:46:29 -0800

As a nonprofit organization which supports the effective use of distance education in California, the Alliance for Distance Education in California (ADEC) supports the rapid implementation of Universal service rates for educators, libraries, and health care providers in order to expedite the availability of all levels of telecommunications services to link students to educational and research resources no matter where those students are located.

ADEC supports the Commission using the same factors as are currently used for low income consumers and those which may be proposed in response to the rulemaking's Section III on Support for Rural, Insular, and High-Cost Areas and Low-Income Consumers. Each library's or K-12 school classroom, could be equated to a low-income consumer unit and eligible for a 10% below the lowest rates offered by a telecommunications service provider to its lifeline customers or 20% below the lowest contract rates offered to corporations or institutions for a particular service.

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Bibliography on 96 Act

Compiled by: B. Hall <Beemarcus@aol.com>

Forwarded by: Gene Hastings <hastings@psc.edu>

Date: Sat, 7 Sep 1996 18:53:50 -0400

A few months ago I asked for help on finding documents that would help me put together some information on the 96 telco act and how it affected local govt. Many of you [muni-telecom@civicnet.org] were very helpful, and requested that i post my bibliography when i was done. Here it is. b. hall

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Summary: Comments by the AARP

Contributed by: Ken Hammer <ken.hammer@ConnRiver.net>

Date: Sun, 8 Sep 1996 18:21:06 -0400 (EDT)

As a 66 year old member of AARP, I thought I'd look at their initial [comments] and reply comments. I am disappointed. My summary will be considered caustic and critical by many. That is intended. My perspective is warped as a father of five college graduates and trustee of an independent secondary school as well as by having previously served as a company president, bank director and hospital trustee. Here are very brief summaries of the AARP initial and reply comments. They joined with two other groups for comment.

4/12/96 Initial Comment by AARP, Consumer Federation of America, and Consumers Union.

This coalition of advocates declares a failure of Congressional intent "...if average Americans pay more for their telecommunications service, lose access to crucial services currently provided as part of basic service, or fail to receive access to new functionalities as they become available...". They desire definitions of affordability which don't create "serious inconvenience" but want individual state, not federal, determination of the affordability and comparability of rates. They want self-certification of 125% of poverty level income as eligibility requirement for basic service, long distance blocking, no-charge on phone company calls, lower installation costs and waiving of initial deposits. Those eligible should be allowed to buy higher grades of service and should not be vulnerable to disconnection for non-pay of long distance bills. Functionalities in the universal service should include "directory assistance, the provision of and listing in annual local directories, Call Trace, 900-number blocking service, equal access to interexchange carriers, interoffice digital facilities, equal access to SS7 functionalities, and interconnection among all carriers and modem facilities".

These advocates want expanded access to universal service as they declare "...AARP, CFA, AND CU are very concerned that the Notice does not address the important, underlying elements of this principle (universal service applies to all consumers) and, instead, limits its scope to only the beneficiaries of the targeted subsidies." They also want the Commission to address the cost allocation rules of Section 254(k).

Everything for everybody everywhere by Federal decree is my harsh summary of this plea. The bulk of the text is rhetoric (including absolute and relative definitions of affordability) in support of the plea. Throughout, there are presumptions of the producing economy's ability and willingness to support the largess, the power of the government to direct the transfers of values without limit, and the self-discipline of consumers to make good use of the system. As a senior citizen, I am not proud of the AARP's posture.

Reply comment summary: 5/7/96 by the same advocates.

In the reply comments the advocates:

- Challenge all cost data & economic impact estimates of the providers,
- Refuse to offer an economic model of their vision,
- Challenge the authority of the commission to act on rates,
- Promote disagreement between local exchange and long distance companies,
- Encourage introduction of new providers,
- Deny anyone's ability to predict new rates,
- Urge retention of rates until some new competition stabilizes conditions, and
- Urge refusal of recovery of some prior investments.

In short, give their constituents all the benefits without risk and let someone else suffer any pain and uncertainty. It is a curious blend of expectation of effectiveness through competition, condemnation of previously regulated suppliers and reliance on future regulation for a result which they claim can be determined only by actual implementation, not prediction.

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Law Establishing Oregon State Telecommunications Forum Council 1995

Contributed by: Carl Kucharski <cski@tiac.net>

Date: Wed, 4 Sep 1996 20:41:29 -0400

Law Establishing the Oregon State Telecommunications Forum Council 1995

68th Oregon Legislative Assembly--1995 Regular Session

Senate Bill 994

Sponsored by Senators Hamby, Kennemer, Representatives Adams, Wooten

An Act

Relating to telecommunications; limiting expenditures; and declaring an emergency.

Be It Enacted by the People of the State of Oregon:

SECTION 1. The Legislative Assembly declares it to be the policy of the State of Oregon:

- (1) To use information technology in education, health care, economic development and government services to improve economic opportunities and quality of life for all Oregonians regardless of location or income.
- (2) To stimulate demand to encourage and enable long-term infrastructure innovation and improvement.
- (3) That telecommunications planning process shall:
 - (a) Organize users in new ways to aggregate demand, reduce costs and create support networks;
 - (b) Encourage collaboration between communities of interest by geographic area and economic sector; and
 - (c) Encourage competition among technology and service providers.

SECTION 2.

- (1) The Oregon Department of Administrative Services shall coordinate the consolidation and operation of all telecommunications systems used by the state and state agencies. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no agent or agency of the state shall construct, purchase or otherwise gain access to a telecommunications system without the prior approval of the department.
- (2) The department shall coordinate the consolidation and operation of emergency telecommunications systems used by the state and state agencies. The provisions of this section shall not be construed to require consolidation of telecommunications systems used by emergency service providers, as defined by the department, into